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Depositions as to the Burning of William and Mary College, 1705.

(From the Originals in the Virginia Archives.)

[“The College of William and Mary, in Virginia,” was chartered February 8, 1692 (new style, February 19, 1693,). The present site at Williamsburg was chosen, and building was begun at once. The college, when rebuilt, after the fire of 1705, is believed to have been much like that which had been destroyed, and Hugh Jones’ description (in “Present State of Virginia,” 1729,) of the latter building doubtless applies fairly well to the former. He says: “The college front which looks east is double and is 136 feet long. At the north end runs back a large wing, which is a handsome hall, answerable to which the chapel is to be built. The building is beautiful and commodious, being first modelled by Sir Christopher Wren, adapted to the nature of the country by the gentlemen there; and since it was burnt down, it has been rebuilt, nicely contrived and adorned by the ingenious direction of Governor Spotswood, and is not altogether unlike Chelsea Hospital.” This venerable institution, so loved and honored by all Virginians, has suffered greatly by fire. The first commencement was held in 1700, “at which there was a great concourse of people; several planters came thither in coaches, and others in sloops from New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland, it being a new thing in that part of America to hear graduates perform their exercises. The Indians themselves had the curiosity, some of them, to visit Williamsburg upon this occasion, and the whole country rejoiced, as if they had some relish of learning,” (*Campbell’s History of Virginia*, 361-2). The college buildings proved useful to the Colony in another way, for from 1700 to 1705 the General Assembly met there. This happy beginning of an institution which had cost so much effort, and on which such high hopes were founded, soon received a severe check. In 1705 the college buildings were destroyed by fire, with the exception of the walls. These have, it is believed, survived the fires of 1705, 1781 (only partial injury to the buildings), February 8, 1859, and September 9, 1862, and still stand, aged

though strong, in the present house. A writer who probably saw the fire of 1705, says: "The fire broke out about ten o'clock at night, in a public time. The Governor and all the gentlemen that were in town came up to the lamentable spectacle, many getting out of their beds. But the fire had got such a power before it was discovered, and was so fierce that there was no hope of putting a stop to it, and therefore no attempts were made to that end." The library and philosophical apparatus were destroyed. The second building was commenced in the time of Governor Spotswood, but owing to the want of available means and the scarcity of workmen it was not finished until 1723. It was so far finished in 1719 as to be occupied by the Convention of the Colonial Clergy. On October 30, 1705, the day after the fire, the Governor called a Council to examine into the cause of the disaster. The Burgesses were requested to select several of their members to form part of a joint committee for this purpose. The depositions here printed were doubtless taken by this committee. It will be observed that the first deposition given here is imperfect, the beginning having been lost. It is not known how many more depositions were taken; but it is certain that there were others, which have not been preserved in the State archives. For that of Thomas Barber, we are indebted to President Tyler, of William and Mary College, to whom it was given some years ago by Mr. W. M. Cary, of Baltimore.]

TESTIMONY TO THE BURNING OF COLLEGE OF WM. &
MARY, 1705.

* * * * *

be swept since last Spring as there was occasion for it but ye time of its being swept last ye Deponent cannot exactly remember & there hath been no use made of the kitchen since Mr. Ingles left ye College at Michaelmas. As to ye shutting of ye College gates they used generally to be shutt at night, both in ye time of Mr. Blair and Mr. Ingles's keeping the college and since the latters leaving ye College this Deponent hath shutt them several nights but cannot say they were always shut at night. And this to ye best of the Deponent's knowledge and remembrance is ye truth.

Henry Randolph being one that lodged in ye College of Wil-

liam & Mary at ye time of its being burnt doth testify that he was then in bed asleep, and one that lay in the bed with him cryed out the College is on fire, w^{ch} awaked him, and looking up he saw the fire coming over the brick wall into his Room & so starting out of bed he ran down a back pair of stairs, into the great hall and opened the door and ran out, and when he had got about sixty or seventy yards he looked back, and all ye roof of the College was on fire to his thinking.

George Burton, painter, saith that he lay in the Countrys houses at ye Capitol on ye 29th of Oct' last at night. That after he had heard ye Capitol Clock strike Eleven, one Wm. Craig cryed out the College was on fire, Whereupon the Deponent got out of bed, and seeing the light he ran out to ye Street w^{ch} fronts ye College & saw ye fire to his thinking on ye North side of the Cupulo, then ye Deponent with sevⁿ other persons that were at work about ye Capitol went up to ye College, but before he got up the fire was got round ye Cupulo and it for ye most part is consumed.

Collo. Edward Hill being one who lodged in ye College saith as follows:

On Monday last about 9 o'clock I went to bed in Mr. Speaker's Chamber w^{ch} was in ye South end of the College (in w^{ch} place I have laine since the Sitting of the Assembly untill the College was unhappily burnt), I had not been long in bed as I presume (for about 12 o'clock I look'd on my watch & then the College was almost consumed) when I was awakened as I suppose by some noise made by two or 3 persons I found standing at some distance from ye College towards a little house, called as I understand ye Smoak house upon my first coming out. Being so awakened I got up out of my bed and put on my breeches (I think no other clothes) opened a little door that goes out of ye speaker's Chamber into the piazzas, & so ran out of ye South door, what part of the stairs I went down I cannot remember, but as soon as I was out I looked up to see what was ye matter. Seeing a great light I did suppose ye College was on fire, but not seeing any fire as I look'd up I cast my eyes towards the Smoke house or Westerly as I take it, and Saw two or 3 people w^{ch} I did suppose to be those people that belonged to Mr. Ingles, & w^{ch} I understood sometime before to have lodged in ye

Sellar, those people I observed was standing looking towards that part that was called the Hall, and as soon as I faced that building to the best of my remembrance I saw a light fire about one third to one half from the East end of the building called the Hall about half of the roof. I did not look narrowly whether there was any fire in any other part of the building, but it's very probable there might be about ye joining on of the roofs, I mean the North end. As soon as I was satisfied the College was on fire, I made haste back into ye Chamber and looking round considering what was most valuable to save. I pitched on my Chest, and by myself drag'd it out by one end into the piazzas and from thence out of ye South door and at some little distance I left ye Chest, and then returned once more back into ye room and from ye Chamber where I lay took out a sword that was in ye window and somethings else, but what I can't remember, but before I came out I went into ye Closet (and to ye best of my remembrance the Closet door was open) and from thence I took out a portmanteau & a saddle and Silver tankard and went out of ye same door as I did at first, and carryed those things I had in my arms and on my back, almost as far as ye road ye cross going to Jno. Young's, but if I remember well I had like to be knock'd on ye head with something flung out of a window at ye South end. After my return from Securing these things, I last carried out I saw Mr. Henry Lightfoot about ye South end and got him to help me to move my chest w^{ch} I had left at my first coming out, at that time I remember (I think not sooner) ye Cupulo wall all on fire & sevⁿ people about the College. To ye best of my remembrance I saw no more than 2 or 3 persons at ye South end when I first came out, I did not go to ye front untill ye Cupulo was on fire, and to ye best of my remembrance the Cupulo was not on fire when I first came out of ye chamber. When I went to bed there was a little fire in my chimney. Mr. Speaker was not in bed there that night, and to ye best of my remembrance this is what I know of that unhappy fire, and further that when I rose out of my bed I heard no noise like ye firing of a chimney.

Wm. Young of Bruton parish planter saith :

That on ye 29th of Oct' last he came from Capt. Keelings house at Skimino and between ten or 11 o'clock at night past by

the College where he perceived no light, but a small shimmering in the kitchen. The Deponent rode towards Colo. Jennings quarter almost as far as ye great poplar on the road side, and then perceiving a light shine about him, he turn'd his horses head and saw a great smoke and a small flame towards ye back part of ye College towards the piazzas as nigh as he can guess, it seemed to be midway between ye south end of ye College and ye cupulo, he rode back to Mr. Young's and called out thrice to alarm ye people, telling the College was on fire * * During w^{ch} time as ye Deponent sat there on horse back he saw three men running about 30 yds. distance from ye College gate towards Mr. Henry Tylers and saw them run cross ye road beyond the little thicket, they seemed to be persons in pretty good apparrell, two of them had dark colored cloathes & the other light colored & all had hatts, but the Deponent did not see these persons return. At last a woman came out of Mr. Young's house, and cryed fire ! fire ! Then the Deponent alighting tyed his horse at Mr. Young's and went from thence to ye College where sevⁿ people were got before him and particularly Mr. Young's serv^t maid. When he came there he remembers to have seen a gent. in black, standing by ye College, whom he thought to be Mr. Whateley, he then saw ye fire get about ye cupulo, and ye back-side of ye roof over the piazzas seemed to be all on fire, but did not go to ye back part of ye building till after ye smoke house was on fire w^{ch} was late.

Wm. Eddings, overseer to Mr. Commissary Blair saith :

That on Monday the 29th of Oct^r after he was gone to bed he heard ye dogs bark in his corn field, and his wife getting up to see what was ye matter, and telling him there were horses in his corn field, he made a shift to get up, tho' he was very lame and as he comes out he perceived a light in ye air and a great smoke, and ye light encreasing he perceived the College was on fire and could see clearly the chimneys and the cupulo, and it seemed to him that the fire was on ye north side of ye cupulo, between ye two chimneys on the back part of ye college over the piazzas, but the Deponent being very lame could not go to ye college. And further saith not.

Novem^r ye 8th, 1705.

John Young, ordinary keeper in W^mburg, saith:

That on ye 29th of October last, he was awaked out of bed by his Servant maid Susanna Hooper, telling him the College was on fire, whereupon he got up and saw a great light but staid till he had put on his Cloaths and then running to ye College to the best of his remembrance the Cupulo was then on fire, and further saith not.

Susanna Hooper, Servant Jno. Young, sworn, saith:

That on ye 29th of October last, as she was in Mr. Young's kitchen at night, one Young called at the door, crying out ye College is on fire, why don't you get up & save y'selves, else you'll be burnt. Whereupon this Deponent look'd out & saw the College on fire as she supposed on ye south end near Mr. Young's house between that & the Cupulo * * *

While she was calling the s^d gentlemen, the above named Young came into the kitchen and sate down there.

The Deponent look'd out at ye window of a Room on ye North end of Mr. Young's house above stairs where Capt. West lay, and perceived the fire on ye south side of ye Cupulo & ye Cupulo was not then on fire.

John Morot, Ordinary Keeper, sworne, saith :

That on ye 29th Oct^r last at night he was in his house, he saw a great light shine through his window, and going out he perceived the roof of the College on the North Side of the Cupulo to be on fire, whereupon he ran in and told some gentlemen who were there in his house, who all came out and went to ye College, as the Deponent believes. The Deponent * * * after them, looked upon ye College, and then ye fire was got on both sides of the Cupulo.

Captain Thomas Barber saith :

That on ye 29th of Oct^r last, as he was in bed at night in one of ye Country's houses* near the Capitol, he was awakened by Mr. Miles Cary, who called out the College was on fire. Whereupon

* Country's Houses—See *Hening's Statutes*, 1704, Vol. III, p. 226. "An Ordinance empowering Mr. Henry Cary to make sale of the Country Houses in the city of Williamsburg."

the Deponent got up, and running out towards the street saw ye fire, as he thinks, round about the Cupulo, but doth not remember whether any other part was on fire.

Williamsburg, November, 1705.

Upon further Consideration of some questions asked me (Upon my examination the other day concerning the unhappy accident of the College being burnt) relating to ye great hall of ye College, I am apt to think that soon after I came down to the South end of ye s^d College, as I was running to and fro in my fright and hurry, moving things thrown out of ye windows. I once see the south side of the roof of the said Hall on fire, but I cannot be positive whether I did or not.

C. C. THACKER.

VIRGINIA MILITIA IN THE REVOLUTION.

[Though no complete roster of the regular troops of Virginia in the armies of the Revolution has been prepared, yet information regarding them is fairly complete and accessible. Heitman—for officers; Saffell; the volumes of bounty warrants in the State land office; the reports of John Hill Smith, Special Commissioner on Revolutionary claims, published in the documents of the House of Delegates in 1834, and for several years after, contains quite a full list, at least of those who served three years, and were so entitled to bounty land. There are also in the State Library two volumes, State and Continental Lines respectively, of men paid off at the close of the war. But in regard to the militia little is known, and that little is very inaccessible. The journals of the House of Delegates, the many volumes of the Council Journal of the Auditor's accounts, during and after the Revolution contain a great amount of matter, but only discoverable after long and patient research. The only book of accounts now remaining, devoted entirely to the militia, is a small volume, which it is proposed to copy in full in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Later this will be followed by extracts from the sources referred to above.]